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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses infant attachment, which it defines as a long-lasting emotional bond revealed when a child under stress seeks out and tries to stay close to a specific figure. The paper addresses: (1) What is attachment? Who are the pioneers in attachment theory?; (2) How do we notice attachment in action?; (3) Is attachment the only behavioral-motivational system?; (4) How is attachment measured?; (5) What kinds of attachment patterns have been found?; (6) Is infant attachment the same for all caregivers?; (7) Does culture make a difference?; (8) Is attachment classification stable over time?; (9) Does abuse/neglect affect the kind of attachment that develops?; (10) Is early infant attachment related to later child competence?; (11) How is attachment measured beyond infancy?; (12) Are preschoolers' peer interactions related to early attachment?; (13) Does teacher-parent relationship affect infant attachment?; (14) Are there gender differences in attachment findings?; (15) Is there intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns?; (16) Are infant temperament and attachment related?; (17) Are infancy attachments to mother and father equally predictive later on?; (18) Does maternal return to employment affect infant attachment?; (19) How much do attachment relationships with teachers count?; and (20) What can caregivers do to help secure attachment flourish? (Contains 29 references.) (EV)

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Presentation at the annual NAEYC Conference, New York City, November 2002

EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT ATTACHMENT

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1. What is Attachment? Who Are the Pioneers in Attachment Theory?

Attachment is a long-lasting emotional bond revealed when a child under stress seeks out and tries to stay close to a specific figure. Biologically built-in behaviors reveal growing positive attachment. **Signalling behaviors are:** crying, calling, and reaching out to the special caregiver. Among self-propelled, **executive behaviors** are: approaching, seeking, climbing up on, clinging and grasping, or suckling on the special person. **Differential behaviors:** baby more frequently and positively smiles, calls to, looks to for reassurance, and follows after the attachment figure in comparison with responses to other persons.

No single behavior is an index of attachment. The "father" of Attachment Theory is John Bowlby. Other researchers and clinicians include: Mary Ainsworth, Alan Sroufe, Inge Bretherton, Avi Sagi, and many others.

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2. How Do We Notice Attachment in Action?

When a child is tired, sick, shivering from cold, or hurt and in pain, then she will try very hard to reach the attachment figure to gain protection and reassurance. Once the baby gains physical closeness and absorbs comfort, then the intensity of the activation

of the attachment system diminishes. Reassured, baby explores toys across the room as long as the attachment figure is available. The **set goal** of the attachment system is for baby to feel secure. As baby learns confidence in the availability of the attachment figure(s),behaviors are intensely focused on, and organized in response to the special person.

3. Is Attachment the Only Behavioral-Motivational System?

No! Attachment needs are shaped by continual transactions with caregivers and are always in dynamic interplay with exploration/ curiosity and fear/wariness arousal.

4. How is Attachment Measured?

An experimental procedure, called the **Ainsworth Strange Situation (ASS)**,takes place over a 20 minute period divided into 3 minute episodes. First, mother and baby come into a room with toys. Baby plays in the room with mother present. A stranger enters and mother leaves baby for 3 minutes with the stranger. Mother returns. **Reunion** behaviors of the baby are carefully observed.Stranger leaves. Baby again plays in the room with mother present. Mother leaves;baby is alone for 3 minutes;stranger returns briefly, and then mother returns. Second reunion behaviors with mother are then coded and analyzed. Because baby was briefly left alone, this second episode of mother leaving is more stressful for an infant.

5. What Kinds of Attachment Patterns Have Been Found?

ASS research reveals four major infant attachment patterns at 12 and 18 months:

Secure attachment (B). During reunion, baby seeks contact (bodily or by smiles and greetings.Baby relaxes deeply on the attachment figure's body and **accepts comfort** and reassurance. Baby gains courage and energy to go back to constructive play. B babies use the caregiver as a **secure base** from which to explore the environment. B babies express and communicate even negative feelings openly with the caregiver; they trust she/he will be accessible and responsive if they need comfort, reassurance, care, or attention. Mothers of B babies during home observations were more likely to: hold babies in a tenderly careful way;enjoy close cuddles and playful affection with baby;feed in tempo with infant needs and feeding styles;give babies floor freedom to play;interpret infant emotional signals sensitively;respond promptly and reliably to infant distress signals, and comfort infant distress appropriately; provide **contingent pacing** and judicious **levels of stimulation** in face-to-face interactions during routines and play; Help babies manage and cope with overwhelming or intense emotions.

From the Strange Situation, three patterns of **insecure, anxious attachment,** labelled A, C, and D, have been identified:

Avoidant (A) babies seem undisturbed by separation from mother and indifferent to her re-entry. They ignore mother and do not ask for hugs or comfort, but at home they may be angry, demanding, and

protest separation. They rarely sink contentedly onto mother's body for comfort. Mothers of A babies showed marked aversion to close bodily contact with baby. They tended to be unexpressive emotionally with their babies, more rigid, compulsive.and resentful. Their babies begin to act more "independent" as if they have already learned that they cannot expect to receive hugs or kisses. A babies may develop anger and lack of trust in the attachment figure and are less compliant with her.

During the ASS procedure, **Ambivalent/Hesitating (C)** babies approach mother obviously wanting to be comforted. Ye they turn away,cannot accept comfort, and may even hit at the mother or squirm to get down if she does pick child up. C babies show intense mixtures of anger and fear. They sometimes show inconsolable distress after separation. As toddlers, C babies show more restricted exploration and less imaginative symbolic play.

At reunion, babies coded as **Dazed/disoriented/disorganized (D)** seem to lack purposeful goals. They display contradictory behavior patterns:run toward mother for reunion, interrupt the movement, and look confused.Some strongly avoid the parent on reunion and then strongly seek closeness. D Babies are 2 to 10% of middle-class infants.Mothers of D babies have sometimes suffered unusual trauma of separation from, or early loss of, their own parents.

6.Is Infant Attachment the Same for All Caregivers?

No! Attachment is relationship-specific, not infant-specific. Baby will form a secure attachment with a specific ,consistently

emotionally available, caring person, tuned into distress signals and promptly meeting baby's needs appropriately. If she or he loses the attachment figure who provides comfort and protection, the child will grieve and become very distressed.

7. Does Culture Make a Difference?

Yes. The proportions of secure, avoidant and ambivalent attachments vary depending on culture group. In the United States, about 2/3 of babies are B, securely attached; 20% are A, and about 10-15% are C. In Japan and Israel there are proportionately fewer A babies and more C babies.In Germany, there are more A babies.

8. Is Attachment Classification Stable Over Time?

In middle class families, yes (over 80%), but lower (about 60%)in high-risk families. Attachment, an internalized working model, serves as a guide for and interpreter of future emotions, perceptions and behaviors across the life span, and across other relationships. When infants are abused, over time their classifications are more likely to become insecure.

9. Does Abuse/neglect Affect the Kind of Attachment that Develops?

Attachment relationships, internally organized, operate at an unconscious level as dual templates. The baby learns about the caregiver's availability and nurturance in times of stress and also baby perceives his or her own worthiness and lovability. An abused baby grows up feeling unlovable and acts fearful as a child victim.

In adulthood, that person may also activate the internalized model for becoming in turn a rejecting/unloving and fearsome abuser.

10.Is Early Infant Attachment Related to Later Child Competence?

Yes! Secure attachment in early infancy has been related to later toddler competence in tool-solving problem situations. During a difficult tool-using task, older toddlers who had been earlier classified as insecure infants, now showed more of the following behaviors: opposition, crying, temper tantrums, lack of compliance with moms, and lack of persistence in problem solving. Small children who have ego resilience and flexibility as well as deep feelings of being lovable have more life energy to focus on learning tasks.

11. How is Attachment Be Measured Beyond Infancy?

Using Water's Q Sort test, a caregiver sorts 100 items about the child into piles from "Very like" to "Very unlike"the child.

12. Are Preschoolers' Peer Interactions Related to Early Attachment?

Yes! Babies classified as A in the ASS are more likely to act as bullies;C babies as preschoolers are more likely act as victims.

13. Does Teacher-Parent Relationship Affect Infant Attachment?

Yes!Infant attachment to caregiver is higher if caregivers rate their relationships with mother more favorably.

14. Are there Gender Differences in Attachment Findings?

Yes. Researches reveal that boys are more vulnerable to deprivation of affectionate maternal nurturance and therefore may be more vulnerable to developing insecure attachments. At 15 months in the NICHD study, boys received less responsive care than girls in centers and childcare homes. Caregivers need to ensure loving responsive care equally for male and female children.

15. Is there Intergenerational Transmission of Attachment Patterns?

Yes! The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) classifies adults as Autonomous, Dismissive (of attachment experiences), Preoccupied,or Unresolved; 65% of grandmother-mother-infant triads had corresponding attachment classifications in three generations. But reflectivity helps adolescents and adults become tender and attuned, despite earlier hurtful family relationships.

16. Are Infant Temperament and Attachment Related?

Not necessarily! **Temperament**, or personality style is described as either:"easy,flexible" "difficult, feisty", or "slow-to-warm up, cautious". When mothers with irritable babies were highly focused on and positively involved with their young babies and they also received support from spousal figures, then even year-old infants with difficult temperaments, were just as likely to be securely attached to mother.

17. Are Infancy Attachments to Mother and Father Equally Predictive Later On?

No. The correlation between security of attachment to mother at one year and at 6 years of age was r = .76. For fathers, the correlation between 18 months and 6 years was lower, r =.30. Emotional openness and verbal fluency were more related to attachment to mother than father in infancy. Moms more often recruit the child's attention, communicate the nature of the goal of a game or toy, effectively reduce child frustration, avoid negative interruptions, or rejections of child attempts at symbolic play, and show mutual pleasure during mother-toddler play - which gives an advantage to secure infants to succeed at learning tasks!

High school courses on how to nurture young children are needed to teach young males as well as females skills in intimate loving interactions with very young children! Schools and prenatal services need to give more chances and more encouragement for males to learn a wide repertoire of nurturing interaction behaviors with infants prior to their becoming parents. Many fathers have indeed learned how to initiate games and respond in nurturing, loving , and leisurely ways in interactions with their babies.

18. Does maternal Return To Employment Affect Infant Attachment?

It depends. Some research suggests that only full time employment , but not part-time employment in the first year of life, is associated with an increased chance of insecure attachment of baby to mother. These data are particularly clear for high-risk

families.

If mom's intimate affectionate relationship with baby is strong, and childcare is of high quality, then baby becomes securely attached by 12 and 18 months.For at-risk infants, security decreases when moms return early (in the first year) to full-time employment. Research in Haifa has shown that when training is low for daycare staff and the ratio of infants to caregivers is high, then insecure attachment to parent is more probable. State and Federal monetary support for training high-quality childcare staff is an essential ingredient to ensure that secure attachment of an infant to each parent is not endangered by maternal return to full time employment.

19.How Much Do Attachment Relationships with Teachers Count?

A lot! Teacher involvement and center quality both affect infant attachment. Attachment to teacher is greater for babies in care for a longer time with the same teacher.

20. What Can Caregivers Do to Help Secure Attachment Flourish?

See Honig's (2002) NAEYC book for dozens of ideas to boost intimate loving care! And share ideas with others!

Particularly, be sure to touch and caress tenderly; shine eyes at each child and use loving voice tones; create "Magic Triangles" to engage children's attentiveness to learning tasks; "dance the developmental ladders of learning" in easy steps; show genuine individualized interest; carry tiny babies in slings; murmur

admiringly while diapering; attend promptly to distress signals, decode child needs and comfort appropriately; act so that children feel you will keep them feeling safe and lovable.

Prevent discipline problems by attending to baby tiredness or to signals that a child is hungry, frustrated by a difficult task, in need of a cuddle or some loving reassurance. Use positive discipline techniques, such as soothing a frustrated toddler before he reaches the point at which he may burst out and behave inappropriately. Use the "distraction technique" to redirect a baby who is headed toward another baby to bop him cheerfully with a toy! Use "victim centered discipline" to point out the consequences of hurtful actions. Be firm as well as loving in making clear classroom and home rules for not hurting others and for thinking of ways to help each child in a group feel he is liked and treated with gentleness and friendliness.

Teachers may need more information and ideas in order to tune into temperament styles. The cautious, shy child or the triggery, irritable child needs special attention to manage social situations so that peaceful interactions can take place. Remember that babies with difficult temperament styles are just as likely to become securely attached to caregivers if the adults tune into a) their needs for special handling in situations where they are likely to respond with impulsive or intense negative feelings, and b) the need all children share for feeling deeply cherished.

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